

Douglas B. Reeves

Three Challenges of Web 2.0

There's no doubt that Web 2.0—the social and technological phenomenon that enables users to generate content, interact, and share information across borders—can be a force for good in the world of education. I've contributed to and worked with many Web sites that enable educators to share and deepen best practice: for example, www.AllThingsPLC.info, a site for educators seeking information about professional learning communities. ASCD (www.ascd.org) is an international leader in providing free research, practical applications, and—through its Inservice blog—opportunities for educator-to-educator discussion on the Web.

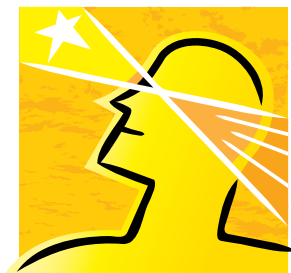
My enthusiasm for collaborative Web-based content is tempered, however, by concern about the following three challenges, which education leaders and policymakers should consider as they develop policies and practices to integrate the Web into professional practice and student learning.

Partners versus Promotion

Today's technology advocates are sometimes reminiscent of the character in the film *The Graduate* who fervently insisted to young Benjamin that the future lay in “one word—plastics.” They promote a particular piece of software, interactive Web site, or digital device as if it were an enduring key to success rather than a transient tool of the moment. These are the successors of those

who assured 1960s and 1970s high school students that knowledge of Fortran and COBOL would guarantee their career success, when actually a study of logic, English composition, and a couple of other languages might have been more helpful.

Educators must distinguish between promoters who are attached to short-term ideas and partners who see technology as a means to an end—enhanced learning. There is a crying need for brand-neutral analysts, advisors, and consultants who will help school systems evaluate alternatives in technology and who are unambiguously disconnected from advocacy.



High Touch versus High Tech

Education is a relationship-based enterprise. Technology allows users to create and sustain “relationships” by electronic means, but such relationships lack the high-touch connection inherent in voice-to-voice and face-to-face interaction.

The lack of personal relationships in the context of Web 2.0 is a problem because of the high level of trust needed between content contributors and users. The closer the personal connection, the harder it is to engage in deceit. As a *New Yorker* cartoon caption put it, “On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog.” In education, where fact-free debates too often hold sway, personal credibility and multiple sources are essential. These components are more likely to be present when a real name, a

real face, and a real person are associated with the claims and advice offered on the Web.

Filters versus Fountains

I teach a debate and speech class in which students must regularly research and argue different sides of public policy questions. The class is held in the school library every Friday, and students sit within a few feet of reference vol-

**The Web is
nonjudgmental,
which is both its
strength and
its Achilles heel.**

umes that would answer their questions about the United Nations Charter, the Social Contract, or the Emancipation Proclamation. Yet they remain transfixed by thousands of Google hits, preferring to wade through the electronic chaff to find a few grains of wheat. Oppressed as they are by a teacher who finds Wikipedia an insufficiently credible source without supplementary documentation, my students sometimes work longer and less efficiently with a search engine than they would have by consulting a carefully chosen reference book.

The Web is nonjudgmental, which is both its strength and its Achilles heel. Although my skepticism about Wikipedia is sure to elicit criticism from Wikivangelists, the online encyclopedia is the best illustration I can offer of the dilemma between filters and fountains. Although some Wikipedia articles in-

clude secondary source citations, others reflect solely the purported expertise of the contributors and editors.

In a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, Nicholas Carr asks, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”¹ Carr fears that our continual interaction with information on the Web may be “chipping away our capacity for concentration and contemplation.” It may be creating students who believe that research means cutting and pasting until the teacher’s page requirements have been met instead of distilling the essence of an argument. Such students confuse data with knowledge and thus lose the opportunity to apply intellectual filters in a manner that reflects critical thinking. Today more than ever, students need guidance to turn the Web’s deluge of information into meaningful knowledge.

Keep the Human Connection

As we embrace the advantages that Web 2.0 offers for schools and students, let’s remember that online interaction will never replace the human connections that underlie the most powerful education. Think for a moment about your best teachers and most inspiring leaders—the ones who challenged you to be better than you thought possible. Did they equip you merely with the most efficient way to learn many things, or did they provide essential insights that helped you make sense of what you learned? It still takes a person to accomplish that kind of teaching and learning. **EL**

¹Carr, N. (2008, July/August). Is Google making us stupid? *The Atlantic Monthly*. Available: www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/google

Douglas B. Reeves is Founder of the Leadership and Learning Center; 978-740-3001; DReeves@LeadAndLearn.com.

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

American Public University	73
877-777-9081 www.apus.edu	
America’s Choice	C3
877-530-2716 www.americaschoice.org	
Argosy University	77
800-377-0617 www.argosy.edu	
ASCD	25, 82
800-933-2723 www.ascd.org	
Bisk Education	3
800-605-5346 www.bisk.com	
BudgetText	85, 87, 89
888-888-2272 www.budgettext.com	
California University of Pennsylvania	83
724-938-4000 www.cup.edu	
Delta Education	63
800-258-1302 www.delta-education.com	
Exemplars	93
1-800-450-4050 www.exemplars.com	
Eye on Education	83
888-299-5350 www.eyeoneducation.com	
Fielding Graduate University	94
800-340-1099 www.fielding.edu	
Foundation for Educational Administration	91
609-860-1120 www.featraining.org	
Friendship Public Charter	53
202-281-1700 www.friendshipschools.org	
Harvard Graduate School	73
617-495-3414 www.gse.harvard.edu	
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Learning	47
617-351-5000 www.hmco.com	
Indiana Wesleyan University	6
765-677-2710 www.indwes.edu	
International Learning Corporation	86
866-343-5189 www.ilcmail.com	
National Science Teachers Association	2
703-243-7100 www.nsta.org	
Northcentral University	88
866-776-0331 www.ncu.edu	
Recorded Books	88
410-535-5590 www.pluggedintoreading.com	
Safe and Civil Schools	C4
541-345-1442 www.safeandcivilschools.com	
School Improvement Network	1
866-835-4185 www.schoolimprovement.com	
Seton Hall	93
800-313-9833 http://education.shu.edu/execedd	
Solution Tree	C2
812-336-7700 www.solution-tree.com	
UMUC	46
800-888-8682 www.umuc.edu	

Copyright of Educational Leadership is the property of Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.